



S TRATEGIES FOR O PTIMUM S UCCCESS

RIFKA SCHONFELD, DIRECTOR

The Summer Edition

During the year, it is so hard to catch your breath. Many of us run from carpool to supermarket, to work, to volunteer project, to exercise, to the doctor's office, to PTA, and then home to cook dinner and clean up. Sometimes the school year feels like it's all about maintenance – just keep going and make it through until June. But, during the summer months, things slow down and it's a great time to check in and reevaluate what needs a little bit of a tune-up. To that end, I've put together a guide of what you can do to bring out the best in your child – whether it is in the academic or social zone.

Reading

How can we as parents and educators ensure that our children continue to use their brains over the summer, but do not regard the reading and math that they do as “work?” How can we teach our children that learning can and should take place outside of the classroom in addition to in the classroom?

► **CHOICE:** Usually in school, children are forced to read the books that their teachers assign. If students are given choice and voice in the learning process, they are more likely to want to learn the material and more likely

to retain it. Let them choose the book.

► **GOALS:** In order to keep her motivated, give her a target number of books and minutes she should read. This reading time can be done after “bedtime” when your child would normally be asleep, making her feel like reading is a special privilege.

► **INVOLVEMENT WITH OTHERS:** Reading often seems like a solitary experience, but it need not be that way. There are many ways to guarantee that reading can be a shared experience: read with your child, set up a literary café with her peers, and find reading opportunities around you on the street.

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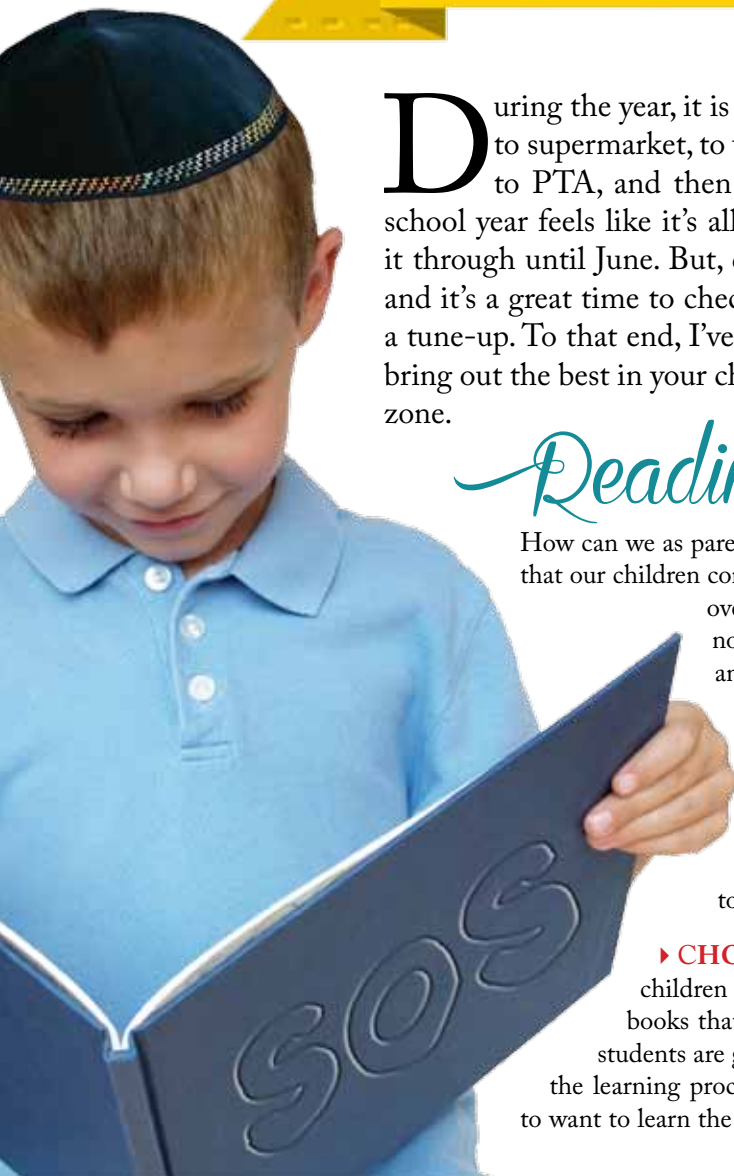
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RIFKA SCHONFELD

SOS Director

An acclaimed educator and social skills specialist, Mrs. Rifka Schonfeld has served the Jewish community for over thirty years. She founded and directs the widely acclaimed educational program, *Strategies for Optimum Success (SOS)*, servicing all grades, levels and subjects, specializing in Kriyah and English reading.

A consummate teacher's teacher, Mrs. Schonfeld created and presents a social skills workshop focusing on key issues in social interaction: shidduch coaching, self-esteem, communication, trust, conflict resolution, bullying, Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

In addition to a children's book on bullying, Mrs. Schonfeld has recently published a picture book for children who struggle with ADHD or have trouble focusing.

Mrs. Schonfeld is available for school engagements and Skype sessions.

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WRITE TO US!
We welcome questions and comments from readers. Is your child struggling with school or friends? Get your question featured in our next newsletter!



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► **SWITCH OFF:** If she has required summer reading, be sure to balance the books she is interested in with the reading-list books. Have them both on hand so that she can switch between them when she gets frustrated by her required reading.

In order to ensure that your goals are met, incorporate some rewards based on reading. As opposed to physical rewards, the most beneficial reading rewards are experiences:

► **TAKE A BOOK-BASED TRIP:** If your daughter reads a book about the circus, consider attending one. If she reads a mystery novel about a stolen painting from a museum, go visit a museum and look at the paintings that spark her interest.

► **MAKE BOOK-BASED FOODS:** Depending on the book that your daughter is reading – choose a food that the characters eat and have a cooking adventure together. For example, if your daughter is reading Roald Dahl's *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, attempt to recreate some of the fantastical candies that are featured in the magical story.

Happy Reading!

Social Anxiety, Separation Anxiety, & OCD

The most common anxieties experienced by children are:

Social Anxiety

People who believe they might have social anxiety exhibit some the following symptoms:

- Trembling, sweating, blushing or shaking in front of others.
- Heart palpitations around people.
- Aversion to speaking to anyone in authority.
- Going to great lengths to avoid criticism.
- Excessive fear of strangers.
- Social anxiety is also linked to depression – quiet resignation and isolation.

Separation Anxiety

Children with separation anxiety worry about separating from their parents during school,

work, and a quick errand, bedtime, or even when they are in the next room.

Kids with separation anxiety report a vague feeling that something bad will happen and they need to be near

their parent in order to prevent that from happening. In order to diagnose separation anxiety, these symptoms must not be isolated and must occur for more than four weeks consecutively.

It's common for these children to:

- Have difficulty attending school.
- Make frequent calls home.
- Show unwillingness to play at friends' houses.

Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

The New York Times defines obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD) as "an anxiety disorder in which people have thoughts, feelings, ideas, sensations (obsessions), or behaviors that make them feel driven to do something (compulsions)."

Some examples of OCD are excessive hand-washing to ward off infection or repeatedly checking the locks on the door to ensure that they are secured.

Solutions

Marianna Csofi, in her book, *School Phobia, Panic Attacks, and Anxiety in Children*, outlines the different ways that parents can help their children overcome anxiety:

- Do not speak about the anxiety in front of your children.
- Do not introduce your own worries.
- Reassure your child.
- Listen to your child's anxieties.
- Create a gentle start to the day. Keep mornings simple.
- Stick to regular routines.
- Seek a professional opinion.

Bullying and Friendship

A national survey reported that over forty percent of students say that they are afraid to go to a school bathroom because of bullying. One in seven children in America reports acting as a bully or a bully victim. Every day, 160,000 students skip school because they fear violence or intimidation. In places where the internet is used for social networking, students describe cyberbullying through name calling and verbal attacks.

How do we address the bullying crisis? First, you need to recognize if your child is a victim of bullying. Below are some telltale signs:

- Returns home from school with torn, damaged, or missing clothing
- Seems afraid of going to school
- Suddenly begins to do poorly in school
- Complains frequently of headaches, stomachaches, or other illnesses.
- Has trouble sleeping or frequent bad dreams
- Appears anxious or suffers from low self-esteem

How to Stop the Bullying Cycle

- Talk to your child. Tell your child that you are concerned about them and that you would like to help them. You can ask direct questions such as, "Are there any kids at school who treat you meanly?" Or indirect questions such as, "Are there any kids at school who you really don't like? Why?"
- Keep your emotions in check. Of course, you need to empathize with your child, but if you become overly emotional, your child will hesitate before talking to you about it again. Stay calm so that you can act as a supportive figure in your child's life.

► Talk to the staff at your child's school. Set up an appointment and explain that you are concerned. Ask questions about what you can do and what measures the school can take to prevent bullying.

► Teach your child to walk with confidence. If your child appears confident and walks away from the situation, he is signaling to the bully that the bully cannot hurt him.

► Encourage other friendships. Promote true friendships by telling your child to invite other children for play dates or study dates.

And, after we address the bullying crisis, we teach children how to make long lasting relationships. Through a child's interactions with even one or two friends, he will develop necessary social skills.

Regardless of their age, one great way to help your child make friends is to build your child's self-esteem. Self esteem is an integral part of lasting friendships. Why? In their book *Self Esteem*, Matthew McKay and Patrick Fanning explain the importance of self-esteem by stating that when you reject certain parts of yourself, you are damaging psychological structures essential to healthy living. For example, in the same way that you protect a physical wound, when you are critical of a part of yourself you will find yourself avoiding anything that might aggravate the pain of self-rejection. Therefore, you will take fewer social, academic, or career risks.

To that end, your child might erect barriers of defense in order to protect himself. Those barriers can include blaming others, bragging about things they don't truly like about themselves,

getting angry, or making excuses. You can imagine how damaging this kind of behavior can be to friendships.

Point out your child's strengths and encourage him to use them in many different situations. This will help him feel better about himself.

Another way to encourage friendship is to pass a smile. Before your child leaves to enter a stressful situation, give them a great big smile. Then, let them know that their job is simply to "pass" that smile to one person who they see that day.

Getting involved in community service or chesed can be a wonderful way to make friends. Being in a group of like-minded people who are looking to help others can provide great opportunities for quality friendship.

Like community service, joining an after-school activity can provide relaxed opportunities that support friendship. Sports and games encourage teamwork and companionship. Your child might also learn skills that will help them in school.



ADHD Coaching

Current research shows that ADHD children are often socially immature. Their interactions with others often appear unfriendly, awkward, remote, abrasive, domineering or insensitive. They tend not to be able to read social cues and to be rebuffed by peers for inappropriate behavior.

Social rejection provokes negative behavior that triggers more rejection, which in turn, reinforces the child's social isolation.

Although medication has been used for years to improve control over behavior and to stimulate and increase attention, medication does not erase the negative feelings and low-self esteem. It does not reverse ingrained habits

and behavior in ADHD children that tend to alienate their peers.

Many experts believe that helping ADHD children to rebuild self-esteem and to master social skills should precede—or at the very least accompany—the use of medication. Only when ADHD kids can truly believe that they are important and worthwhile, and can exercise control over their lives, will they be able to succeed.

The best way to insure long-term success and compliance with treatment is to get ADHD children personally involved in the process early. An ADHD "coach" works with a child often on her own turf, to analyze what specifically is contributing to her social difficulties, and to generate behavioral strategies to improve social interactions.

ADHD coaching also helps children to

- Understand that the source of many of their challenges is ADHD, not personal shortcomings.
- Safely examine areas of failure for clues as to how to implement change.
- Heighten self-awareness and self-observation skills, and use those skills to improve decision-making and performance.
- Change perspective when "stuck" (i.e. learning new ways to work with procrastination, staying on task, or being more productive).
- Become aware of their own learning and processing styles so they can enhance their ability to comprehend information and situations.

SERVICES BY RIFKA SCHONFELD

DYNAMIC WORKSHOPS:

Interactive workshops for mechanchim, mechanchos, parents, teachers, seminary students. Kriyah, English reading, and social skills training.



SOCIAL SKILLS TRAINING:

General language and communication skills: children, adolescents and adults. Includes: explosive and isolated children, bullying issues, phobias, nonverbal communication issues.

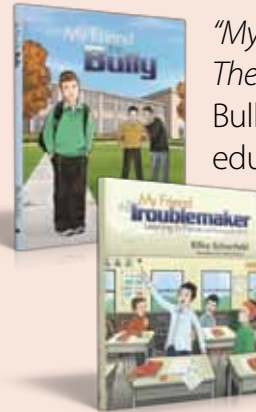
SHIDDUCH COACHING:

Private sessions for life-preparedness for young adults of shidduch age. Issues include: inability to maintain a conversation, poor body language, anger problems, poor self-esteem, and difficulty making commitments. Get your Bochur & Kallah Maidel ready for a Bishow!

EVALUATION & REMEDIATION:

All grade levels Kriyah, English and Math. Help for bochorim and girls to pass GEDs, Regents, CLEP, NYS exams. Evaluations, and advocate for proper school placement.

2 MUST-READ BOOKS



"My Friend The Bully" and "My Friend The Troublemaker" focusing on Bullying and ADHD. For Parents, educators and children. Available at your local Judaica store.

Also offering workshops on these books.

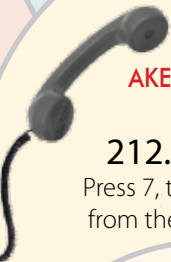
COMING SOON... another edition of the bibliotherapy series "My friend the volcano: ODD"



Listen to Rifka Schonfeld's **RADIO SHOW** on **JROOT 97.5 FM** in the archives, interviewed by Eliezer Gruber of Nutri-Supreme. Also hear it on **RIFKASCHONFELDSOS.COM**



Check out Rifka Schonfeld's forum on **LETSGROWONLINE.COM** Call or write in questions which Rifka Schonfeld will answer. Also view many important questions on various topics.



Listen to Rifka Schonfeld, live on the **AKERES HABAYIS HOTLINE: 212.444.1900** Press 7, then 5, then 1 from the main menu.

Get your CDs on **CONFRONTING ANXIETY in Children & Adults**



To receive more CDs on other topics: "The Jitters: ADHD & Anxiety", "Friendship Episode: Bullying, Relationships & ODD", please contact Rifka Schonfeld.



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